

## District IV Commissioner Romney Rogers



### **Happy memories begin here: Florence C. Hardy Park**

I hope everyone has been enjoying the wonderful weather, spending time in our City parks and creating fond family memories. If you have not visited **Florence C. Hardy Park** lately, you need to see and enjoy the wonderful new amenities. Located at 25 SW 9<sup>th</sup> Street in the Tarpon River neighborhood, the park is a picture-perfect playground and sports facility for everyone from toddlers to seniors. Park patrons love the new, inclusive, play area, which features two “boundless” playground systems (*pictured left*). The playgrounds are designed to eliminate barriers and provide engaging, healthy exercise for people of all ages and abilities. A soft, spongy, green artificial turf underneath the equipment adds comfort and safety. The playground also features a new perimeter sidewalk, fence with gate, and drinking fountains. Neighborhood residents worked alongside City staff to achieve the desired design and amenities.

On the west side of the park, you will find two new multi-use Bermuda grass sports fields with new field lighting and mulch pathways surrounding the fields. Members of the Fort Lauderdale Croquet Club regularly practice and play at the park’s Croquet Court. Last week, one of the members, a gentleman in his 80s, said the beautifully manicured court is “almost like a golf course.” A new area with exercise and fitness equipment is located near the free parking area. The park’s butterfly-friendly shrubs are very drought-tolerant Florida native plants species, including Dwarf Firebush, Wild Coffee, Tropical Sage, and Native Blue Porterweed. Shade and flowering trees were planted, including Live Oak, Gumbo Limbo, and Cassia trees. Infrastructure improvements include a new site drainage system, new domestic water and sewer systems, and a new irrigation system. Plans are underway to replace a portable toilet with new ADA-accessible restroom facilities.

From young families to retired seniors, we all need a healthy dose of sports and recreation to build and maintain strength and character. For this generation and for generations to come, I trust that Florence C. Hardy Park will be the venue where many fond memories begin. ❖

### **Flashing forward with South Side School’s next assignment**

Preserving the treasures that are a rich part of our heritage comes with significant challenges. South Side School (*pictured below*), my elementary school *alma mater*, was built in 1922 and closed in the 1990s. The school is a gem that has been sadly neglected over the years with the disrepair of the empty building becoming an eyesore for the neighborhood and an underutilized asset for the County.

I was not a member of the City Commission when the structure was purchased from the County in 2004, and I did not have the opportunity to vote on project plans or funding during the five years leading up to my term in office, which began in 2009. During that critical period, costly piecemeal renovations began with no clear vision of how the structure would ultimately be used. Construction has been delayed by historic preservation disputes, mold remediation, and differing opinions regarding the most appropriate use of the property. Finding an end-user during the Great Recession likely played a role as well.

Flashing forward, the City has revamped project management and established new deadlines. In short order, one of three proposals will likely determine the next assignment for a repurposed South Side School. Among the proposals:



- 1) Nova Southeastern University has proposed to relocate its Studio School to South Side. Plans include art classes and public use of the facility. On April 1<sup>st</sup>, the Historic Preservation Board approved the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness for Nova’s design proposal.
- 2) The YMCA has conducted an inspection and expressed interest in the facility.
- 3) Concurrent with the first two proposals, the City’s Parks and Recreation Department is close to completing schematic plans for using the first floor of the structure for community programs and the second floor for administrative office space. Build-out would begin this fall.

The plans under review would not require new taxpayer funding as resources have already been budgeted and secured. Preserving and reutilizing South Side School is a worthy goal. It is an investment that will preserve our heritage, stimulate private investment in the neighborhood, and increase property values. We are a city that is leading our region with a vision of re-urbanization and sustainability. South Side School, with its charm and character, is an iconic component of the City’s plan. ❖

**For updates on Hardy Park and South Side School, visit <http://fortlauderdale.gov/HardyPark-SouthSide/index.htm>.**

- ✓ **Save The Date!** The Great American Beach Party is set for Saturday, May 25<sup>th</sup>, from 10 AM to 10 PM on Fort Lauderdale Beach near A1A and East Las Olas Boulevard.
- ✓ Check out the new, bigger, and better year-round **Las Olas Sunday Market**, sponsored by the Downtown Fort Lauderdale Civic Association. More than 30 vendors offer a variety of goods from 9 AM to 3 PM on the corner of SE 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue and East Las Olas Boulevard.